1: Hart & Pilling E-5 (1928-1954) 1960
OI20 Tiwi OI20

Preface

HART WORKED among the Tiwi during 1928 and 1929, and in Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 summarizes the main aspects of their culture as it was at that time. Pilling's fieldwork was carried out during 1953 and 1954, and he outlines in Chapter 5 the contacts of the Tiwi with the outside world before and up until the coming of the first missionaries in 1911, and in Chapter 6 describes the modifications in Tiwi culture that have occurred since 1930. It is rare for two anthropologists who have studied the same tribe at widely separated times to collaborate in writing about them, hence it is worth mention (1) that the two anthropologists had never met nor even written to each other until after Pilling had returned to the United States in 1955; (2) that when they finally got together during 1957-1958 to plan and write the present book, they were both astonished at how little basic disagreement there was between them. Arguments about each other's statements have been numerous and prolonged, but almost invariably these concerned matters of detail or emphasis. The chief result of the collaboration has been the discovery, by each author, and exciting for both, of how well the other knows his Tiwi. This is uncommon enough in anthropology to be noteworthy. We are both grateful to the Tiwi for having brought us together and we are both impressed by the fact that the Tiwi who brought us together were the same complicated but delightful people, despite the twenty-five year interval in our respective sojourns among them.

C.W.M.H.
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Madison, Wisconsin
Detroit, Michigan
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Tiklauila" or "My wife is a Munupula woman"; a mourner would say, "He died when visiting the Munupula and therefore we will have to go to Munupi for the funeral"; an old man would reminisce about being brought up as a youth by his mother's brother, who was a Turupula, and the good times he had in Turupi; and another would recount details of big battles between the Munupula and the Malauila. All of these were band names or band territories. The nine bands thus acted, psychologically, as small tribelets or semisovereign groups, since it was with one of them that every Tiwi most closely identified in his day-to-day life on the islands. It is only when, as nowadays, he leaves the islands to go to work for the white man in Darwin that he has to think of himself as a Tiwi, since there he mingles with men of other tribes. Even then, work and residence in the white man's town does not entirely obliterate band identification. A Tiklauila in Darwin prefers to work with and to consort in the evenings with other Tiklauila, and Malauila with Malauila.[8]

Because of certain peculiar features of Tiwi domestic life, to be discussed below, it is difficult to sum up the Tiwi band in any simple formula. People, especially women, changed their band residence frequently in the course of their lives, and being born into a band did not at all require permanent residence with that band, either for males or for females. Thus the district (for example, Tiklaru or Malau) was a firm, fixed, known quantity, but the people who "owned" the district (for example, Tiklauila or Malauila) were a flexible and constantly shifting collection of individuals.

The territorial boundaries between bands were clear and well known to everybody, though they were not the sharp lines on a map such as we regard as essential for a frontier or a land boundary. All pieces of country—clumps of jungle, stretches of grassland, sections of thick woods—had names. One such piece of country, say a thickly wooded area, belonged to one band, while the more open country that began where the woods thinned out belonged to another; thus the boundary was not a sharp line but a transitional zone—perhaps of several miles—where the change from trees to open savannah became noticeable, with the band territories thus fusing into one another rather than being separated by sharp lines. The Tiwi, so to speak, thought of the landscape as a sort of spectrum where a man moved gradually out of one district into another as he passed from one type of horizon to the next. Since rivers, and even Apsley Strait, a very narrow arm of the sea separating Melville from Bathurst Island, usually have similar types of vegetation on *both* sides or banks, none of the island rivers nor Apsley Strait was a boundary or frontier between bands. The Mandiimbula, predominantly a Melville Island

[8] In the early 1930's the situation at the Government Hospital in Darwin offered a good illustration of this. The hospital authorities said they gave preference for house-boy jobs to "Melville Islanders because of their greater intelligence and reliability." In point of fact, some of the younger Tiklauila had established a monopoly on hospital jobs and no Tiwi other than a Tiklauila was ever hired there. The whites thought they were hiring Tiwi but the Tiklauila saw to it that they hired only Tiklauila and felt no vestige of obligation to other Tiwi to help them get these desirable jobs. The alleged greater intelligence of the islanders was undoubtedly due to the fact that the Tiklauila, having had a Catholic mission in their territory since 1911, were more used to white requirements.

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sister's son being initiated, the attitude of a Tiwi toward the whole *pukimani* state was essentially a passive attitude. *Pukimani* behavior was something one accepted and conformed to when required; it was in no way an active attempt to change nature, people, food, gods, spirits, or anything else in the universe. It is therefore not unreasonable to conclude that since their *pukimani* system offered them no handle by which to seek actively to alter the universe in which they lived, the Tiwi found that universe to their liking as it was. Unlike the tribes of central Australia who lavished a lot of thought upon magical methods of improving the food supply or the rainfall, the Tiwi believed and acted on the belief that as long as they observed their *pukimani* taboos, the food would continue to be as abundant and the rains as regular as they had always been. The central Australians, by seeking to coerce nature through magic, suggest that they found nature unsatisfactory; the Tiwi, by relying upon passive taboo-observance alone, suggest rather that their relationship to nature was an acceptable equilibrium that they wanted to preserve, not change. And if everybody observed his *pukimani* taboos when required, that equilibrium would remain undisturbed. Hence the antisocial man in Tiwi was not the maker of individual magic (he was unknown, anyway) but the nonobserver of taboo. By his nonobservance he threatened to upset the normally satisfactory equilibrium between man and nature. For a senior Tiwi male to be charged publicly with breaking *pukimani* rules was a disgrace and a blow to his prestige and his position in public opinion. His behavior was possibly a sin against the spirits but it was certainly a shame in the eyes of his fellows. *Pukimani* observance was thus a matter of respectability to a much greater degree than it was a matter of pleasing the spirits.

DEATH As was mentioned above, death is the natural phenomenon around which the Tiwi had woven their most elaborate web of ritual. The most frequent and most important Tiwi ceremonies were the mourning ceremonies, and they came in three sizes—small, medium, and large—depending on the age, sex, and importance of the dead person. The mourning ceremonies which drew the crowds were not held until some time after the death and burial. All bodies of dead persons were buried within twenty-four hours of their death by digging a hole near the camp where the death had occurred and placing the body, wrapped in bark, in it. Near most well-used camping spots there was already a graveyard marked by old graveposts, and the latest corpse was buried there or near there. Seldom was the body carried any distance for burial. If a person died even less than a mile from an old burial ground, there was little inclination to carry the body that far. He would be buried, instead, within perhaps a hundred yards of where he died. This had certain awkward repercussions for social organization, since occasionally a person died while away from his home district and, being buried where he died, his ceremonies were held and his posts erected in a district in which his immediate family did not live. Young men often used this to validate a change of residence, giving as their reason for living in a band territory in which they had not grown up, the location there of their father's graveposts.

3: Hart E-5 (1928-1929) 1930 OI20 Tiwi OI20

has no other white inhabitants, while Melville is held under lease by the meat firm known as Vesteys Ltd., but has no permanent white inhabitants, though occasionally campers, beachcombers, and hunters from Darwin stay there for a few months.

All the earlier accounts lay stress on the ferocity and hostility of the natives of these islands, but long albeit intermittent contact with the whites has tamed them. At the present time it is no exaggeration to say that except for the Larakia, who are almost extinct, no tribe in the Northern Territory has so assimilated white ideas or is so familiar with white men. A proof of this is afforded by the fact that members of this tribe are more in demand in Darwin as houseboys than members of any other tribe, simply because, as it is generally expressed, they have more "savvy," that is they are more intelligent and more adaptable to white conditions.

But while their proximity to Darwin and their long experience of white men have taught them much of our ideas and customs, the absence of a permanent white settlement in their country with its consequent massacres and epidemics has on the other hand prevented their numbers being depleted and their social organization being broken down. It is therefore still possible to obtain fairly full and satisfactory information about the life and culture of these islands as they were before white influence began.

The ferocity of these people, I am convinced, has been much exaggerated even by the earliest settlers. As a matter of fact their outstanding characteristic is not their fierceness but their sense of humour, as noted by Spencer. They are constantly laughing, even at the most solemn moments, and this applies to practically every man, woman and child on the island. I am inclined to think that their superior physique, which is very apparent, their huge spears—which incidentally they seldom use, except ceremonially—their striking method of painting their faces and their years of conflict with the Malays, which had accustomed them to stand and fight rather than to run at sight of a stranger, gained them in large part their evil reputation.

In physical appearance they are certainly Australoid, but the men are on the whole taller, sturdier and better proportioned than any of the mainland tribes. This is obvious even in Darwin, where it is an easy matter to pick out almost at a glance a member of the Tiwi. I agree also with Sir Baldwin Spencer that they are superior to the mainlanders,

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YOUNG GIRL AND BOY accompany fathers as men bring yams from pool to the ceremonial ring. There the yams will be

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part of Tiwi speech. Poetic license in pronunciation and syllabification often occurs. The Tiwi have high regard for the linguistic ability needed to become a good Tiwi composer and singer, and instruction in the art of song composition and delivery is given to the initiates. Each initiate must perform in the *Kulama* before he can be considered a "graduate." According to my Tiwi informants, this requirement is the hardest of all, and it is also the reason for there being no set age for initiation. The old people are said to watch the young, and when the observers consider them mature enough, they swoop down upon their choices "like chicken hawks, without warning"—as the Tiwi say—and start the initiates along the path to adulthood.

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As far as I know, the *Kulama* ceremony has no parallel elsewhere in Australia. And there are many interesting questions that come to mind concerning the origin of the *Kulama* as it exists today. For instance, why is instruction in the preparation of a poisonous yam that is not part of the daily diet considered so important for initiation into adulthood? What is the origin of the idea that a yam has power over good and evil, and health and sickness? Why is such prominence accorded a yam in what is principally a hunting and gathering society?

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Any answers to these questions must be highly speculative, for the origin of the ceremony and its development lie in the unrecorded history of the Tiwi. However, I believe the following statements may well be valid.

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Instruction in the natural resources of the land was considered vital to becoming an adult. Because the *Kulama* yam is poisonous and is not widely distributed, it was never part of the regular diet, but it could be used in economic emergencies if properly prepared. Instruction in its preparation was therefore extremely important as a potential survival measure. However, since the Tiwi live in a favorable environment, it is highly probable that such emergencies were very rare, so it was considered expedient to hold annual instruction periods. Because knowledge of

A² [See P. 15(A) for other part of caption and picture -- analyst]

884 194 the technique had to be made meaningful to the initiates, the lifesaving qualities of this famine food were explained as health-giving powers. A ceremony accompanied by song and dance was certainly a dramatic and effective means of impressing the initiates in preparation methods. The ritual served another purpose as well: because traveling is so [180] difficult during the rainy season, each household is isolated from the others. The *Kulama* ritual follows this period, and it is natural to expect a reunion to be an occasion to exchange news, settle differences, and tell stories or sing songs that keep traditions alive.

885 MUCH harder to account for is the Tiwi idea of adulthood. That every adult is solely responsible for his own health and wealth, and that success in life depends entirely on personal behavior and industry, are ideals strangely similar to those that underlie the American way [171] of life, despite the great gulf between the aboriginal culture and our own. But it is not at all surprising that the Tiwi 177 have a great sympathy for much of Western civilization. Many hold the same views as the *Kulama* singer quoted earlier in this article who saw his children wearing clothes ● [181] and shoes and going to school to learn to write, for this is the Tiwi's contemporaneous idea of success in a way of life introduced to them only a few short years ago.

Early in the summer of 1962 I revisited the Tiwi for [114] two weeks. Although I knew that the Tiwi desired schooling and training in European ways of life and would seize any such opportunity afforded them, I was hardly prepared for the tremendous changes that had taken place during the eight years that had elapsed since my first visit.

Three months after the *Kulama* ceremony of 1954, a [871] government school was opened. Now all the Tiwi children go to school, and some who have finished the six-year program in the government school have received subsequent training as teaching or nursing assistants. Some others have had "on-the-job" training in various activities connected with a large-scale forestry project that has been started on Melville Island. In fact, all the able-bodied Tiwi men and women are currently employed, and their tasks bear little or no relation to their old life in the bush.

It is perhaps significant—but to me not at all surprising—that I did not hear a single real complaint from the Tiwi regarding their new manner of living. They seem to like it and are anticipating bigger and better things (in the [324] Western sense) for their children. Hunting has become [868] a week-end diversion and the children receive little or no real instruction in that traditional skill.

178 784 SOME aspects of Tiwi life are slow to die, however. Most of the old taboos, the observance of which was considered necessary in the past in order to insure health and wealth, are still observed, although at least one teen-ager expressed doubt that the taboos had any actual effect on the outcome of one's life. Western medicine and public 197 884 health practices are fast replacing belief in the *Kulama*. During the past eight years only three men have begun the six years of training for *Kulama* initiation, and some of the older men no longer participate in the ceremony. However, as long as even a small number of Tiwi believe in the *Kulama*, the ritual will survive, but I doubt that it will for long.

000 NEAR END of *Kulama* ceremony, performer, although hoarse and tired, must continue to sing until late in the night. [P. 16, (B)]